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Annual report for 2015 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Summary

The present report documents evaluation activities undertaken by UNICEF in 2015. It reviews the status of the evaluation function within UNICEF and reports on progress in implementing the revised evaluation policy. The report considers the governance of the function within UNICEF and efforts made to promote evaluation coherence within the United Nations system and more widely. It presents updates on performance and results and the status of human resources allocations for evaluation. The influence of selected evaluations is reviewed, illustrating how evaluation has been used by teams within UNICEF. Elements of a decision for consideration by the Executive Board are also provided.

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I. Introduction

1. Speaking on the topic of evaluation at the service of the post-2015 agenda, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, affirmed that "Evaluation everywhere, and at every level, will play a key role in implementing the new development agenda." The Secretary-General was speaking at a high-level event in March 2015 hosted by the United Nations Evaluation Group to launch a week of evaluation activities in New York. He continued: "Evaluation is not easy. Nor is it popular. But it is essential. The current constrained budgetary climate makes it more important than ever."

2. UNICEF recognizes the essential role of evaluation in supporting organizational accountability, learning and continuous performance improvement. UNICEF also acknowledges important responsibilities, set out in its revised evaluation policy (E/ICEF/2013/4), to work closely on evaluation activities with development partners at all levels and to assist in the development of evaluation capacity. In helping UNICEF to demonstrate results, promote accountability and provide evidence for better policies and programmes, evaluation contributes directly towards the achievement of the mission, mandate and priorities of the organization.

3. The present report documents the evaluation activities undertaken by UNICEF in 2015. It reviews the status of the evaluation function within UNICEF and reports on progress in implementing the revised evaluation policy, presenting updates on performance and results. As in previous years, the report considers the governance of the function within UNICEF and the efforts made to promote evaluation coherence within the United Nations system and more widely. Attention is given this year to documenting the influence of selected evaluations, with a view to illustrating how evaluation has been used by teams within UNICEF. Finally, elements of a decision are included for consideration by the Executive Board.

II. Governance of the evaluation function

4. The Executive Board maintains oversight of the evaluation function within UNICEF and upholds the central role that it plays within the organization.

5. In 2015, the Evaluation Office prepared and presented to the Executive Board the annual report on the evaluation function for 2014. This was complemented by a management perspective prepared by senior management. In response, the Board adopted a formal decision (decision 2015/10) in which it noted the progress made and called for UNICEF to further strengthen the function.

6. The Evaluation Office also presented four evaluation reports to the Executive Board, each accompanied by a management response:

(a) A real-time evaluation of the UNICEF response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines;

(b) An evaluation of UNICEF upstream work in education and gender 2003-2012;

(c) The formative evaluation of the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES) approach;

(d) An evaluation synthesis entitled "Cash transfer as a social protection intervention: evidence from UNICEF evaluations 2010-2014".

7. Within UNICEF, the internal Global Evaluation Committee serves a valuable consultative function. The Committee met in June 2015 to consider proposals concerning the strengthening of the evaluation function and the revision of the plan for global thematic evaluations. The latter was followed by a consultative process across the organization, which informed the preparation of an updated plan for global thematic evaluations for 2016-2017 (E/ICEF/2016/3), which was presented to the Executive Board in February 2016.

8. The external Audit Advisory Committee considers evaluation to be an important element of the oversight system and monitors the performance of the evaluation function. In its 2014 annual report, presented to the Executive Board in 2015, the Committee noted its satisfaction regarding the steady improvement in the quality of both central and field evaluations and advised management to further improve the timeliness and quality of management responses to evaluations.[1]

9. The Evaluation Office continued to promote understanding and the implementation of the revised evaluation policy and, to this end, prepared a two-page summary that was distributed widely.[2]

III. Evaluation coherence: within the United Nations system

A. Decisions of the General Assembly

10. On 24 September 2015, the General Assembly adopted an ambitious and visionary new development agenda entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".[3] Implementation of the agenda will be subject to regular follow-up and review, informed not only by systematic data collection but also by country-led evaluations. In the resolution, the Assembly called for assistance to strengthen, where required, national evaluation capacity.[4]

11. The reference to strengthening national systems builds upon the first-ever General Assembly resolution on evaluation (resolution 69/237), adopted the previous year. In the resolution, the Assembly invited United Nations entities to support, upon request, efforts to further strengthen the capacity of Member States for evaluation, in accordance with their national policies and priorities.

12. The need to strengthen evaluation capacity was also noted in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (resolution 67/226), adopted in 2012. The QCPR emphasized the importance of evaluation and the use of evaluation evidence and called upon members of the United Nations development system "to intensify efforts to assist programme countries to strengthen national evaluation capacity in programme countries for the monitoring and evaluation of operational activities for development."

[1] www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/UNICEF_AAC_2014_Report-16Apr2015.pdf.
[2] www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Evaluation_Policy_Brief-2pager_Final.pdf.
[3] General Assembly resolution 70/1.
[4] See paras. 74 (g) and (h).

13. In 2015, UNICEF dedicated efforts to addressing the requirements set out in those resolutions by supporting countries to develop national capacities for evaluation. Particular emphasis was given to supporting the establishment of national evaluation policies and frameworks as well as national capacities for country-led evaluation. An effective approach has been to link evaluation capacity development to high-priority policy issues. For example, in July 2015, the Government of the Philippines approved a national evaluation policy framework that complements recent reforms in planning and budgeting. The framework was developed with technical assistance, training and facilitation provided by UNICEF and other partners. UNICEF is responding in a similar way to a request by the Government of Cambodia for assistance in developing guidelines for a national monitoring and evaluation system intended to support the timely monitoring and evaluation of the national strategic development plan.

14. UNICEF has also worked with other partners to support parliamentarians to champion evaluation and use it in their work (see section IV).

B. United Nations Evaluation Group

15. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) is a professional network composed of the evaluation units of some 46 organizations across the United Nations system. UNEG aims to enhance the coherence of evaluation across the United Nations system and, accordingly, supports the development of system-wide evaluation coherence through the application of agreed norms and standards; the development and exchange of tools and guidance; the undertaking of peer reviews of its members; and, increasingly, outreach and partnerships with evaluation initiatives within and beyond the United Nations system.

16. In recent years, UNEG has played an advocacy and coordination role with respect to the General Assembly resolutions noted above and is a member of the interim coordination mechanism for the independent system-wide evaluation of operational activities for development of the United Nations system mandated by the 2012 QCPR.

17. UNEG therefore plays an increasingly influential role in promoting system-wide coherence around evaluation. Accordingly, UNICEF continues to invest in and often leads UNEG activities. In 2015, UNICEF stepped up to play an enhanced leadership role when the Director of the Evaluation Office was appointed Vice-Chair of UNEG, with particular leadership responsibility over the UNEG partnership agenda.

18. UNICEF played a major role in arranging and hosting the UNEG Evaluation Week, held in New York in March 2015. The Evaluation Week included the high-level event, mentioned above, at which the Secretary-General spoke on the role of evaluation in the new development agenda; an evaluation practice exchange, co-chaired by UNICEF and the Global Environment Fund and hosted at UNICEF House, which was deemed highly successful by participants; and the 2015 annual general meeting.

19. UNEG operates through various inter-agency working groups. In 2015, UNEG established, for the first time, a humanitarian evaluation interest group. The aim of the group is to (a) promote humanitarian evaluation; (b) ensure that relevant criteria,

as required by United Nations evaluation norms, rules and guidelines, are adequately taken into account; and (c) improve the quality of humanitarian evaluations produced by United Nations entities. UNICEF is part of this group. The first joint activity is a desk review of humanitarian principles intended to improve understanding of how the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are evaluated, and to highlight good practices, challenges and opportunities.

20. In November 2015, UNEG formalized a partnership with another evaluation network, the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), which brings together national evaluation associations around the globe. The informal alliance between United Nations entities, IOCE and other organizations, together known as EvalPartners, has over the past several years established itself as major influence by mean of its advocacy for the increased use of evaluation and for the strengthening of evaluation capacities. Further details appear in section IV.

C. Inter-agency evaluations

21. Inter-agency evaluations conducted jointly by United Nations entities provide an important avenue for strengthening evaluation coherence. These have taken various forms and UNICEF has played an active supporting role in each, including by providing technical and management input as well as some financial contributions.

22. Two joint evaluations have been launched under the independent system-wide evaluation mechanism (ISWE), mandated by the General Assembly in the 2012 QCPR. This mechanism, with the involvement of a number of actors, including UNEG, is testing an approach intended to put independent evaluation of system-wide issues on a sound footing. UNICEF, with others, has provided financial and technical support. Two topics were chosen for pilot evaluations:

(a) Meta-evaluation and synthesis of United Nations Development Assistance Framework evaluations, with a particular emphasis on poverty eradication. This evaluation was approaching completion at the end of 2015;

(b) Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals. The inception report for this evaluation was completed at the end of 2015.

23. A thematic evaluation to assess Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH Initiative) provided evidence and options to guide further action.[5] The evaluation was undertaken jointly by the World Food Programme (WFP) as the lead agency, along with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF.

24. In 2015, the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) Group undertook two joint evaluations of the United Nations response to major humanitarian emergencies. The IAHE Group, coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of

[5] www.wfp.org/content/faowfpunicefwfpwhodfatd-canada-joint-evaluation-renewed-effort-against-child-hunger-and-unde.

Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), operates under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IAHE Group works to pursue concerted action on evaluation matters relating to humanitarian issues. The inter-agency humanitarian evaluations, nearing completion at the end of 2015, were concerned with, respectively, the response to the conflict in South Sudan and the response to the crisis in the Central African Republic.

25. These inter-agency humanitarian evaluations have generated important findings for the United Nations system. Protracted emergencies, such as that in South Sudan, are typically embedded in long-term patterns of conflict and underdevelopment. Programmes should therefore support efforts across the spectrum of relief, recovery, development and resilience; targeting must address the needs of large populations that may be difficult to reach; and, to enhance sustainability, national and local stakeholders need to be closely involved in the response.

IV. Evaluation coherence: global

A. Development networks

26. In 2012, UNICEF co-founded EvalPartners, a global network aimed at reinforcing innovative partnerships to enhance the evaluation capacities of civil society organizations, influence policymakers and advocate for stronger national evaluation systems.[6] The other founding partner was the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), a network that brings together national evaluation associations around the globe. Many agencies and institutions have since joined EvalPartners, which has fostered a wide range of evaluation capacity-development initiatives, including peer-to-peer interactions to promote South-South and triangular cooperation among development evaluation associations. An evaluation of EvalPartners' activities, undertaken in 2015, confirmed that the network has established itself as major influence in evaluation activities around the globe, while identifying several areas requiring attention in order for EvalPartners to develop further.[7] As noted above, UNEG and IOCE have now formalized the core partnership, co-chaired by the President of IOCE and the UNEG Vice-Chair for Partnerships, who is also, at present, the Director of the UNICEF Evaluation Office.

27. In 2014, EvalPartners members designated 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation or "EvalYear" and organized more than 90 events around the globe. This culminated in a highly successful Evaluation Week in Nepal that brought together evaluators, academics, activists, officials, government ministers and parliamentarians for meetings on evaluation. These included the biennial Global EvalPartners Forum, which was addressed by the Prime Minister of Nepal, and a landmark assembly at the Parliament of Nepal, chaired by the Speaker of Parliament.

28. A key output from the Global EvalPartners Forum was the finalization and approval of the Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020, which focuses on evaluation

[6] www.mymande.org/evalpartners.

[7] www.mymande.org/sites/default/files/files/EvalPartners-Evaluation-Executive-Summary-(2015_02_03).pdf.

capacity development and professionalization at the level of individual evaluators and institutions concerned with evaluation as well as within the wider field of those concerned with commissioning, authorizing or financing evaluation activities, thereby creating an enabling environment for evaluation. UNICEF was a major contributor throughout and is arranging the publication of the Global Evaluation Agenda on behalf of EvalPartners.

29. The Global Forum also saw the launch of several subnetworks within EvalPartners, including EvalSDGs, aimed at advocating for the evaluation of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in the framework of the 2030 Agenda. Other EvalPartners subnetworks include EvalGender+, which focuses on evaluation around equity and gender equality; EvalYouth, which aims to advance the skills and knowledge of young evaluators; and EvalIndigenous, which aims to improve the participation of indigenous people in the planning and evaluation of the development processes that affect them. UNICEF plays a leadership role in EvalSDG and is engaged in the other networks.

30. In related activities, UNICEF has also worked with EvalPartners to engage parliamentarians in support of evaluation and to encourage them to use it in their work. In several regions, a parliamentarians' forum has been set up and, in November 2015, the Global Parliamentarians' Forum for Development Evaluation was launched.

31. UNICEF continued to support the development and update of a global evaluation web platform known as My M&E (monitoring and evaluation), which is associated with EvalPartners. UNICEF has contributed to the learning resources available through My M&E, in particular the finalization and launch of an e-learning course in Arabic, featuring 33 eminent evaluation specialists.[8] UNICEF has also continued to support the growing number of global, regional and national evaluation conferences and conclaves that help to promote evaluation capacity and coherence.

Humanitarian networks

32. In the field of the evaluation of humanitarian action, UNICEF has played a key role in the IAHE Group and in the launch of the UNEG Humanitarian Evaluation Interest Group. In addition, UNICEF continued to work with the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP). In 2015, one of the network's key outputs was the final version of the "Evaluation of humanitarian action pilot guide" and a companion online training course based on it. More than 2,200 people have taken the training course since its inception.

33. The ALNAP guide also provided the basis for an initiative launched in 2015 by the Evaluation Office to build capacity within UNICEF country offices for the evaluation of humanitarian action. As few evaluations of humanitarian action are undertaken by UNICEF at the country level, this ongoing initiative takes a hands-on approach, providing training and support to country offices that commit to undertaking such evaluations. Further details appear in section VI.

[8] www.mymande.org/elearning.

V. The evaluation function in UNICEF: key performance information and analysis

Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System

34. The information reported in this section is derived mainly from the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS). The system provides for the independent assessment and rating of reports on country, regional and global evaluations; feedback on the quality of reports to offices; and the compilation of performance information into a management information dashboard. GEROS quality ratings are based on careful, systematic assessments made by external reviewers, using criteria based on UNEG standards.

35. Since GEROS was set up in 2010, adjustments to update and strengthen it have been reported to the Executive Board at various times, most recently in 2015 (see I/ICEF/2015/10). In 2015, a comprehensive external review was conducted. The review found GEROS to be highly relevant, as it contributes to the evaluation function of UNICEF, to quality control at the regional and country levels and to decision-making within the organization. Evaluation capacity has been improved through GEROS feedback, and the quality of evaluation reports and, by implication, of evaluation processes, has consistently improved over the years. The reports to management and the Board on evaluation quality have been used in making decisions to strengthen systems and processes for better results. The assessment also found that the costs for implementing GEROS were reasonable and that GEROS had considerable potential to further enhance knowledge management in UNICEF.

36. While the assessment reconfirmed the relevance and value of GEROS, several improvements were proposed. Recommendations called for a less complex rating tool; the updating of current guidance documents; locating and bringing into GEROS evaluations that are incorrectly labelled "studies" or "reviews"; instituting a policy of the prompt uploading of evaluation reports and the timely production of reviews and feedback; improving the dissemination of GEROS results; increasing consistency by further strengthening coordination between the Evaluation Office and the Office of Research; and undertaking regular reviews of the GEROS system to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

37. The Evaluation Office believes that the review has been relevant and useful and, in consultation with other offices, is preparing a management response. Action to address agreed recommendations will be reported to the Executive Board at a future date.

Performance overview

38. A suite of six key performance indicators (KPIs) provides a general overview of performance trends in 2015, supplemented by information from previous years. In most years a seventh KPI is presented on the implementation of the plan for global thematic evaluations, which are evaluations undertaken by the Evaluation Office. It is omitted in the present report because progress was reported in the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017: review and update for 2016-2017 (E/ICEF/2016/3), presented to the Executive Board at its first regular session in 2016.

39. On the basis of the analysis in the following section, four major conclusions are warranted:

(a) For the third consecutive year, UNICEF offices reported the completion of fewer than 100 evaluation reports. This number seems anomalous, considering that financial investments in evaluation and the human resources base have both been increasing. Understanding what drives and constrains coverage and completion requires further examination and analysis;

(b) The quality of the evaluation reports followed the trend first seen in 2013 towards a high percentage of good/excellent evaluations. The quality improvements have occurred together with a sustained focus on higher-level results (i.e., at the outcome or impact levels);

(c) Weakness in certain elements of evaluation practice continued to raise concern, namely in the appropriate consideration of ethical issues. However, this indicator showed significant improvement from the previous year, as did the ratings for two related priorities: the incorporation of human rights, gender and equity concerns and engaging stakeholders in ways suited to their capacities and interests;

(d) Budget use can now be tracked through the UNICEF Virtual Integrated System of Information (VISION). For 2015, the data shows that UNICEF committed 0.65 per cent of its programming funds to evaluation compared with the 1 per cent called for in the policy. This was a welcome increase compared with the 0.33 per cent recorded in 2011 and the 0.5 per cent recorded in 2014. However, the level of evaluation expenditure remained significantly below target.

40. It will be important to give sustained attention to the need for: (a) increased evaluation coverage in and submissions of evaluation reports to the evaluation database; (b) improvements in the implementation of management responses; and (c) reaching the corporate policy target for evaluation spending of 1 per cent of total programme expenditure. Given the high level of decentralization in UNICEF, addressing these issues will require further reinforcement of the planning, budgeting and execution of evaluations at each level of the organization.

Performance against key performance indicators

Indicator 1: Number of evaluations managed and submitted to the global evaluation database[9]

41. In 2014, UNICEF offices completed and submitted 82 evaluation reports, down significantly from the 96 submitted in 2013. Productivity by region varied from a low of 3 evaluations submitted in one region to as many as 16 in Eastern and Southern Africa.[10]

42. In its decision 2014/10, the Executive Board asked for more information on coverage. Globally, 74 per cent of country offices have completed at least one evaluation in the past three years and submitted it to the global evaluation database,

[9] In this key performance indicator (KPI), as in others, the figures refer to evaluations completed in 2014 and assessed in 2015, the most recent year for which data was available. Evaluations are generally submitted at the end of the year, and the analysis of evaluations completed in 2015 was not available for the present report, which was prepared in early 2016.

[10] Of the 82 reports submitted, 13 were submitted late. The data in the KPIs in table 1 are based on the analysis of the 69 submitted on time for the GEROS review.

but it appears that 35 country offices (26 per cent) have not done so. While recognizing that undertaking evaluation in some contexts is difficult, UNICEF needs to give attention to closing coverage gaps and meeting its accountabilities in this regard. Criteria for evaluation coverage are set out clearly in the revised evaluation policy (E/ICEF/2013/14).[11]

Indicator 2: Topical distribution

43. For evaluations completed in 2014, a breakdown of topical distribution shows that, over four years, the percentage of evaluations dealing with only a single sector can vary widely (see table 1). The leading sector can change from year to year: in 2013 it was nutrition and in 2014 it was education. Given the relatively small numbers involved, these are normal fluctuations.

44. Two particular findings are notable. First, only 6 per cent of the evaluations focused on humanitarian programming. This is disproportionate to the high (and increasing) levels of expenditure on humanitarian action. Second, some 9 per cent of all evaluations reviewed focused specifically on gender equality, in addition to paying frequent attention to gender equality within sectoral evaluations. This is a good result and maintains the similarly positive finding noted for evaluations completed in 2012.

Table 1
Topical distribution of evaluation reports, 2010-2014

Topic[a]	*Baseline 2010 percentage*	*2012 percentage*	*2014 percentage*
Sector-specific, by key results area of the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017	66	41	66
Child survival and development		26	23
Health			13
Nutrition			0
WASH			10
Education	15	13	32
Child protection	15	8	6
HIV/AIDS	10	5	4
Social inclusion	1	1	1
Programmes covering several sectors	34	43	16
Cross-cutting themes	–	10	9
Organizational performance/other	–	6	9

Source: GEROS reports, 2011-2015.

[a] Sector names now correspond to those used in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017. There is direct comparability with pre-2014 figures, given the close correspondence of older and newer names.

[11] See para. 49: Evaluations will usually be undertaken: (a) Before programme replication or scaling-up ...; (b) When responding to major humanitarian emergencies ...; (c) Following long periods of unevaluated programme implementation ...; and (d) For each programme outcome result component, when expenditure has reached $10 million ....

Indicator 3: Types of evaluations conducted

45. The percentage of evaluations looking primarily at the output level continued to decline, as desired. Results at the output level should routinely be addressed by monitoring and review processes. Evaluations should focus on higher-level, more complex results. However, the percentage of impact-level evaluations fell sharply in 2014, and this figure justifies monitoring to ensure that programme impacts are fully evidenced over time, whether by evaluations or other methods.

46. The percentage of formative evaluations — those conducted early in the programme cycle to assess whether implementation is unfolding satisfactorily — maintained the relatively low level first noted for 2012 (see table 2). This suggests that multidimensional and real-time programme monitoring is beginning to provide much richer data for managers than conventional programme monitoring, thereby reducing the demand for formative and output-level evaluations.

Table 2
Types of evaluations conducted, 2009-2014

Type of evaluation	*2009*	*2012*	*2014*
By programmatic results level examined[a]			
Output-level evaluations	33	18	15
Outcome-level evaluations	24	30	68
Impact-level evaluations	43	52	18
By managerial intent[a]			
Formative-level evaluations	45	24	29
Summative-level evaluations	55	76	71

[a] Summative evaluations normally have formative elements as well, and impact-level evaluations may also look at output-level issues. This table records solely their primary purpose.

Indicator 4: Quality of UNICEF evaluation reports

47. The quality ratings have shown a positive trend in recent years, and this trend continued in 2014 (see table 3). The 2014 data show the highest-ever level of satisfactory/excellent ratings and the lowest level of poor ratings. This is the third consecutive year of excellent results. The GEROS raters noted a specific positive result for 2014: 88 per cent of the evaluation reports uploaded attached the terms of reference, compared with only 57 per cent in prior years. This allows more accurate ratings and supports the knowledge-management function of GEROS through the sharing of tools with offices considering evaluations with a similar theme.

Table 3
Quality of completed evaluations, 2009-2014

Quality rating	*2009*	*2012*	*2014*
Confident to act (*good* or *excellent*)	36	62	74
Almost confident to act (*almost satisfactory*)[a]	34	30	23
Poor	30	8	3

[a] "Almost confident to act" is selected when the report content appears to be accurate and the evaluation was correctly managed, but there is some shortcoming that prevents having full confidence. The problem is often underdescription in the report or a weakness in a small portion of the effort within a generally good approach.

48. The overall quality rating is a synthesis of many specific ratings. Two of these — stakeholder participation and human rights/gender/equity — are sensitive indicators of the mainstreaming of corporate commitments (see table 4). In 2014, both took a large leap forward.

49. As part of a more nuanced analysis of the appropriate inclusion of gender issues in evaluation, UNICEF is now conducting, annually, a specific review of evaluation content using the norms for the United Nations System-wide Action Plan (SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. More than a quarter of UNICEF evaluation reports met (14 per cent) or exceeded (13 per cent) requirements, while 45 per cent approached but did not meet requirements and 28 per cent missed the requirements. While not ideal, this represents a major improvement over the 2013 baseline of 5 per cent meeting requirements, 60 per cent approaching requirements and 35 per cent missing requirements.

Table 4
Mainstreaming of selected corporate emphases in completed evaluations, 2010-2014

	Percentage of reports attaining a good or excellent rating		
Corporate emphasis[a]	*2010*	*2012*	*2014*
Appropriate incorporation of human rights, gender and equity concerns	18	44	60
Engagement of all stakeholders in ways suited to their capacities and interests	40	48	66
Ethical issues and considerations and the appropriate ethical safeguards are described	10	32	49

[a] Drawn from among the elements analysed in each report, based on the United Nations Evaluation Group quality standards for evaluations.

50. UNICEF committed in prior reports to pay more attention to the management of ethics issues in its evidence functions, such as evaluation and research, through a variety of initiatives. Preparatory work in 2014 led to guidance issued in 2015 on safeguarding ethics in evaluation and research and related functions. The discussion of ethics and the certainty of more oversight was apparently understood by UNICEF offices. Although the 2014 level is not yet satisfactory, at 49 per cent, it represents a

major improvement from the 2010 and 2012 figures. It will continue to receive attention.

Indicator 5: Use of evaluation, including management responses

51. Utility is a key evaluation principle. As evaluation quality has improved, there is good reason to capitalize on the time and funds invested in evaluation by making effective use of the results. The management response translates evaluation recommendations into agreed actions. At UNICEF, the revised evaluation policy requires the preparation of a management response for each evaluation. The Evaluation Management Response (EMR) system (composed of a database, guidance, training, monitoring, etc.) was initiated in 2009 with the aim of strengthening evaluation utilization by clarifying management accountability and follow-up to agreed recommendations. There are two key phases: (a) the initial response, detailing the full set of office commitments to the evaluation recommendations, and (b) subsequent updates on actions actually taken within the 12-month implementation period for the response. The goal is for 95 per cent of commitments to be fully implemented (recognizing that full implementation may prove to be impossible in some cases).

52. The submission rate of the initial responses to the database declined from 92 per cent in 2013 to 81 per cent in 2014, although it was still well above the 2009 baseline of 10 per cent. The implementation of agreed actions, including actions completed and ongoing, for the 2014 evaluations was 76 per cent by end 2015 and is on track to reach the levels attained in prior years of 86 per cent completed and ongoing seen after one to two years. However, this general positive trend co-exists with another. Over the past four years, about 31 per cent of agreed actions remained listed as underway for two years or longer after the completion of the evaluation. A further 14 per cent were either cancelled (2 per cent) or never started (12 per cent). Taken together, therefore, some 45 per cent of management response commitments were not registered as completed within the stipulated period. This represents weak performance.

53. To understand what lies behind these figures, the Evaluation Office commissioned a review by an external team of consultants. The review was launched at the end of 2015 to determine whether the EMR met the needs of UNICEF and, specifically, to examine the EMR system, its overall benefits and areas for possible improvement.

54. The results emerging from the ongoing review indicate that guidance on the EMR system is generally clear, appropriate and aligned with the UNICEF revised evaluation policy. The overall strengths of the EMR process include supporting accountability, transparency and monitoring processes. However, it appears that the EMR tracking system does not fully capture all of the actions being undertaken in response to evaluation recommendations. Many UNICEF staff believe that EMRs contribute to better planning and decision-making, but a smaller number feel that EMRs contribute to the increased exchange of knowledge. Although the UNICEF EMR system is similar to that of comparator organizations, the EMR process overall would be improved by increased clarity around roles and responsibilities; increased support; the provision of validating evidence; and greater partner involvement. The review also recommends increased oversight of compliance with requirements.

55. As with the review of the GEROS system, the Evaluation Office believes that the review of the EMR system has been relevant and useful. A management response to the review will be prepared following consultation with other offices, and actions to address agreed recommendations will be reported to the Executive Board in due course.

Indicator 6: Corporate spending on evaluation

56. Corporate spending on evaluation was reported to the Executive Board each year through 2011, when changes in UNICEF financial management systems led to data becoming non-comparable. However, since 2014, following the adoption of the VISION financial management system, it has again been possible to report on this indicator. In 2015, VISION data showed that a total of $29.2 million was spent or committed to evaluation activities within UNICEF, against total programme expenditure of $4.505 billion. This contrasts with expenditure on evaluation totalling $18.9 million in 2014.

57. The 2015 data show that 0.65 per cent of UNICEF programme budget expenditure was devoted to evaluation. This represents a 30 per cent increase from the 2014 amount of 0.5 per cent, and shows significant progress towards the policy goal of raising evaluation spending to a minimum of 1 per cent of total programme expenditure. Nevertheless, according to the policy target, UNICEF is underspending on evaluation. Among the seven regions, one has exceeded the 1-per-cent threshold (Latin America and Caribbean, at 1.2 per cent) while the lowest levels of spending recorded in other regions were 0.1 per cent and 0.2 per cent. Headquarters spending on evaluation reached 2 per cent, boosted to some extent by the reallocation of funds for the evaluation of major emergencies from the regions to headquarters.

VI. The evaluation function in UNICEF: human resources

58. Effective evaluation presupposes the provision of adequate resources. In this section, to capture trends over time, information on the human resources available for evaluation in 2015 is compared with baseline data at least two years old.

59. As of December 2015, 106 country offices had professional posts that included evaluation in the job title, compared with 100 offices in 2013 and 85 in 2008. Such posts also existed in all seven regional offices and in four headquarters locations (New York, Geneva, Copenhagen and Florence). Table 5 indicates changes between 2008 and 2015 in the number of evaluation professionals, with important disaggregation for levels 3 and higher.[12] More than 64 per cent of all evaluation positions were in the international professional category.

[12] Level 3 is the desired minimum level to ensure broad evaluation competence, but it is not required that posts be at or above that level.

Table 5
Growth in number of UNICEF evaluation professionals, 2008-2015

	3/2008	*12/2013*	*12/2015*	*Growth 2013-2015*	*Growth 2008-2015*
International evaluation professionals at level 3 or above	50	95	118	+24%	+136%
National evaluation professionals at level 3 or above	40	63	66	+5%	+65%
Evaluation professionals at level 3 or above (total)	**90**	**158**	**184**	**+16%**	**+104%**
Evaluation professionals at level 1 or 2	NR	90	95	+6%	NA
Percentage of evaluation professionals in field offices	84%	90%	94%	+4%	+12%
Percentage of female evaluation professionals at level 3 or above	42%	50%	48%	-4%	+14%
Percentage of female evaluation professionals at level 1 or 2	NR	40	36%	-10%	NR

Source: Division of Human Resources data, various years.
NR = not reported.

60. During the past two years, the positive trends under way since 2008 have intensified. The growth of 24 per cent in higher level posts is helping UNICEF to meet its corporate commitment to increase skills in evaluation and provide opportunities for career development in the field. The goal of gender parity has nearly been reached in higher-level posts and already exists within the international professional portion of posts at levels 1 and 2. UNICEF has also been drawing on the talents of professionals from both industrial and programme nations, and has achieved a 50-50 balance within the international professional cadre (65 staff from industrial nations and 64 from programme nations). The 140 national officers are from programme nations.[13]

61. Staffing at level 3 or above is taken as a proxy for the capacity to deliver high-quality evaluation. Offices with such posts increased to 84 in 2015 from 78 in 2013 and 53 in 2008. A further 24 offices had evaluation staff at level 1 or 2 only. Around 20 per cent of country offices lacked any specialized evaluation staff.

62. The growth in posts (24 per cent) over the biennium far exceeded the growth in offices with posts (8 per cent). The main cause for this difference is that better-resourced country offices have been increasing their monitoring and evaluation cadres. Thirty-one offices had three or more evaluation professionals, ranging from very large (e.g., Ethiopia and India) to moderate-sized offices (e.g., Bolivia and the Philippines). The commitment within UNICEF to provide humanitarian assistance is seen here in the many offices in emergency-afflicted countries that have invested in three or more monitoring and evaluation staff (e.g., Liberia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen). Further, a full quarter of the UNICEF evaluation positions exist in hardship duty stations, in both the D classification (10 per cent of

[13] "Industrial" and "programme" are the official nomenclature used within UNICEF for country classification.

monitoring and evaluation posts) and the extreme hardship duty stations, classified as E (16 per cent).

63. Separately, two level-3 evaluation posts were filled through the centrally managed new and emerging talent initiative (NETI), bringing the total to 19 NETI monitoring and evaluation posts over seven years. Seven of the 12 young professionals who have completed their two-year initial appointment have secured a full-time position in a country office, fulfilling the goal of transitioning to regularly funded positions.

64. UNICEF continued to monitor the level of evaluation effort. In 2015, more than 90 per cent of staff members with evaluation responsibilities performed a second function (see table 6). The percentage performing a third job function increased slightly, mainly due to larger offices adding level 1 and level 2 sub-office-based monitoring and evaluation officers to support programme monitoring and other monitoring efforts, including MoRES.

Table 6
Professional job-function combinations involving evaluation, 2013-2015[a]

Number of functions in job title	*Combinations observed at level 3 or higher*	*Percentage (number) 2013*	*Percentage (number) 2015*	*Change 2013-2015*
1	Evaluation	9% (15)	9% (16)	0%
2	Monitoring and evaluation Planning and evaluation Research and evaluation	68% (106)	65% (120)	-5%
3	Planning, monitoring and evaluation Social policy, monitoring and evaluation	23% (37)	26% (48)	+13%

Source: Division of Human Resources data, 2014 and 2016.

[a] To maintain consistency with earlier reports, the data refer to posts at level 3 or higher only.

65. Increasing support to multiple evidence functions strengthens the UNICEF programme as a whole, but can also reduce the attention to evaluation. Periodic surveys have previously established that evaluation receives about 15 per cent of a monitoring and evaluation officer's time. A 2015 survey of such officers in two regions is the most recent measurement of time allocation. It confirms that the time and attention of monitoring and evaluation staff is a scarce resource under intense demand, and that the time given to evaluation in these regions, at around 10 per cent, is less than the prior estimations.

Table 7
Estimated allocation of time of monitoring and evaluation staff

Monitoring and Evaluation Officer task	*Percentage of time allocated*		
Considering your work in the past six months, distribute the percentage of your time in each of these tasks.	*CEE/CIS*[a]	*LAC*[b]	*Mean*
Situation monitoring (studies, surveys, situation analyses)	23	27	25
Support to the planning function/Planning Unit	16	16	16
Analysis and dissemination of data	14	13	13.5
UNICEF programme monitoring (level 1/level 2)	11	14	12.5
Supporting capacity strengthening of the national statistical system	12	[c]	–
Evaluation	10	10	10
Social policy	10	11	10.5
Other	4	9	6.5

[a] Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.
[b] Latin America and Caribbean.
[c] The LAC survey did not have this option for respondents. Work in this task area is probably reflected in the "other" figure.

66. Staff training and support are important. In 2013, an internal e-learning programme was launched to strengthen the practical capabilities of UNICEF country offices to manage evaluations effectively. Certificates are awarded to staff who successfully complete the course. A total of 296 people completed the e-learning course entitled "Evaluation in humanitarian settings" and 7 people completed the more recently introduced course entitled "Introduction to the decentralized evaluation function in UNICEF". Following course completion, monitoring and evaluation specialists are invited to submit and implement a knowledge application plan to work towards an advanced certificate.

67. It has already been noted in this report that humanitarian work undertaken by UNICEF, especially its response to level 1 and level 2 emergencies, has been underevaluated in relation to the growing scale of humanitarian programming. In response, UNICEF has launched an initiative to strengthen its capacity to design, manage and use evaluations of humanitarian action. The initiative consists of a series of training workshops and technical guidance for evaluation managers and their government and civil-society partners, which are delivered at key milestones of the evaluation cycle. The training, led by the Evaluation Office, is linked to the implementation of actual evaluations that serve as case studies throughout the training.

68. In 2015, workshops were delivered in three regions and 12 evaluations were launched. The initiative will be extended to an additional two regions in 2016. It is intended that the exercise not only build capacity for undertaking the evaluation of humanitarian action but also, through the completion of the ongoing evaluations, that it contribute to knowledge and learning within UNICEF and among its partners about the humanitarian action that the organization supports.

69. The Evaluation Office continues to adjust its structure to meet its accountabilities under the Strategic Plan. In 2014 and 2015, the leadership function was bolstered and the thematic evaluation staff cadre reinforced. At the end of 2015, the Evaluation Office had evaluation specialists at level 4 or 5 in the following fields: two staff positions in emergencies and one each in health/HIV/AIDS/ nutrition, education, early childhood education (ECD), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and institutional effectiveness. The level-3 cohort now consists of three temporary assistance professionals and one NETI professional. The health, WASH, ECD and NETI posts were introduced in the past two years. The section that oversees evaluation capacity development and knowledge management consists of a level-5 position and a level-3 position, each on core funds. In addition to the evaluation professional cadre, the Office has three General Service positions and two management positions (a P-5 Senior Adviser and a D-2 Director).

VII. Strengthening evaluation within UNICEF: influential evaluations

A. Using evaluations for decision-making, learning and policy advocacy

70. In UNICEF, evaluations are undertaken at the global and decentralized levels to provide reliable evidence to inform decision-making within UNICEF and among the organization's partners and stakeholders, as well as for well-founded advocacy and policy reform. Evaluation results are of limited value unless they are accepted and understood by UNICEF partners and beneficiaries, accompanied by intelligent recommendations and lead to a management response that is acted upon in a comprehensive and timely way. The Executive Board has asked for increased attention to these matters.[14]

71. The use of evaluation evidence is an important consideration not just at the stage of reporting evaluation results but throughout the evaluation cycle: from the planning and design of evaluation activities to execution and reporting. "Evaluation influence" is a way of thinking about the effect that an evaluation can have in terms of improved performance and programming as well as effective advocacy for better policies. Elements to take into account to determine the level of influence of an evaluation include whether the stakeholders accept the findings, whether they trigger action by stakeholders and whether they have immediate or delayed effects, both direct and indirect. Other aspects include how the evaluation was used in support of policy decisions or improvements in planning and programming and implementation, including improvements in programme performance and increased attention to such priorities as equity, gender equality and social inclusion. The following section of the report discusses evaluation influence, drawing on recent examples from UNICEF regional and country offices.

[14] E.g., decision 2013/13.

B. Analysis of some influential evaluations at the country and regional levels

72. This section of the report highlights the ways in which a range of evaluations have informed and, to some extent, shaped decision-making, learning and policy advocacy, and can thus be considered influential evaluations.[15]

73. Several evaluations influenced the programming approaches followed by UNICEF and/or its partner organizations. For instance, as a result of the evaluation on ECD pilot efforts, UNICEF Jordan intends to rollout a "*makani* (child friendly spaces) + ECD" module in urban areas in which ECD services are not already available. The multi-country evaluation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) of a programme that is working with Palestinian adolescents as agents of change has been used by stakeholders to inform decisions and shifts in the approaches of work in the area of adolescent and youth engagement. It also strengthened UNICEF programming for adolescents in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arabic Republic and the State of Palestine. The evaluation of the "Let Us Learn" programme of Afghanistan showed that innovative approaches in education at the community level provide opportunities for out-of-school children and adolescent girls to complete their education. In Bangladesh, an evaluation of the strategic positioning of UNICEF in the country is informing the preparation of the upcoming country programme which, while maintaining a strong service delivery approach, will include an enhanced focus on climate change and disaster risk reduction as well as more upstream policy and advocacy work.

74. In Bangladesh, the evaluation highlighted the use of the life-cycle framework to achieve increased cross-sector collaboration among programmes. Similarly, in India, the evaluation of the protection and education rights of children demonstrated that the "convergence approach" (aligning several sectors to support areas or groups in a reinforcing fashion) would benefit the child labour and child rights strategies. The recommendations were incorporated into the country office child labour strategy currently under development and informed UNICEF programming in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly on work with the Education, Judiciary and Police departments of the Government. In Pakistan, the evaluation of the UNICEF Sanitation Programme at Scale led to the incorporation of a clear theory of change

[15] The following evaluations were conducted in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Republic of the Congo, the Syrian Arab Republic, Viet Nam and the State of Palestine: Let Us Learn (LUL) Formative Evaluation, 2014 (Afghanistan); Evaluation of UNICEF strategic positioning in Bangladesh, 2015 (Bangladesh); Evaluation of promoting the protection and education rights of children in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, 2015 (India); Evaluation of the UNICEF emergency psychosocial support response for Syrian children in Jordan, 2015 (Jordan); Evaluation of the equity focus of the Malaysia country programme, 2015 (Malaysia); Evaluation of the UNICEF Sanitation Programme at Scale in Pakistan (SPSP), phase I (2013-14), 2014 (Pakistan); Evaluation of the programme aimed at improving the quality of life of indigenous populations in the Republic of the Congo, 2015 (Republic of the Congo); Evaluation of UNICEF-supported Ministry of Education and Training's mother tongue-based bilingual education in Viet Nam 2006-2014, 2015 (Viet Nam); and Evaluation of phases III and IV of the programme Palestinian adolescents: agents of positive change — towards an environment promoting peace and reconciliation, 2015 (multi-country programme: Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the State of Palestine). Available from www.unicef.org/evaluation/index_90792.html.

in the programme roll-out, along with distinct, well-defined pathways of change for urban and rural settings.

75. Several evaluations influenced policies at the central or decentralized levels. In Malaysia, the evaluation of the equity focus of the country programme of Malaysia led to an enhanced partnership and engagement with key stakeholders at the national, regional and global levels, which was reflected in the country programme. Finally, the multi-country evaluation findings and recommendations for MENA have influenced the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in its work with adolescents and youth in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

76. Certain evaluations have been instrumental in guiding the scaling-up of programmes. In Jordan, UNICEF has continued to move forward with the scaling-up of the child friendly spaces in informal tented settlements programme in order to reach more children, especially vulnerable children. In Viet Nam, following the evaluation of the mother tongue-based bilingual education programme, the authorities at the provincial level have been using their own resources to apply and institutionalize the bilingual education approach more widely.

77. Other evaluations stressed the importance of equity issues. In Jordan, the makani approach in informal tented settlements will reach vulnerable children not commonly able to access UNICEF spaces. In Afghanistan, UNICEF oriented its efforts towards pursuing educational equity by providing educational opportunities for the most marginalized children, especially girls. The evaluation promoted the idea of a bigger programme that could contribute to addressing not only educational inequities, but also social and economic inequalities. In the Republic of the Congo, the evaluation of the programme was aimed at providing insights on how to improve the quality of life of underserved indigenous populations. In Malaysia, the evaluation led to the development of equity-focused strategies that addressed adolescents and girls, based on the mapping of stakeholders to identify key champions of equity issues. The research phase of the evaluation coincided with discussions on the country programme held with key partners. This helped to raise the visibility of the equity agenda, especially within the government ministries, in support of initiatives on behalf of vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, migrants and stateless children.

78. These examples provide a brief indication of the kinds of positive influence and stimulus that evaluations can exert in a wide variety of cases. The challenge remains to measure and monitor such influence on a more comprehensive and consistent basis. This is important if UNICEF is to obtain maximum utility and benefit from its work on evaluation. The ongoing review of the EMR system throws some light on these issues, but further work is required to document and analyse the role and influence of evaluation, especially in the changing development context under the 2030 Agenda. Evaluation has the potential to strengthen, focus and accelerate progress towards the global goals, but it is important to understand more clearly what evaluation processes are most useful and how evaluation evidence can best contribute to global progress for children.

VIII. Conclusion: challenges and prospects

79. This report has outlined the continued progress being made in strengthening key aspects of the evaluation function in UNICEF, as measured through the GEROS indicators and other information. It has also noted the increased efforts devoted to promoting coherence in evaluation approaches and practices, notably through UNEG and the dynamic EvalPartners initiative.

80. However, it has also highlighted the rapidly changing development context and the challenges that must be met if swift progress is to be made under the 2030Agenda. Much will need to change if, as the Secretary-General insists, "Evaluation everywhere, and at every level, will play a key role in implementing the new development agenda." A key shift in emphasis here is towards country-led evaluation and the strengthening of national evaluation systems and capacities. At the same time, appropriate ways must be found to make the best use of evaluation evidence within the wider framework of data, information and knowledge generation and use. Adequate expertise and resources will be required globally to allow knowledge to be used effectively to unlock the potential of the next generation of children around the globe, in pursuit of a prosperous and peaceful world.

IX. Draft decision

81. The Executive Board

Takes note of the annual report for 2015 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2016/11).